## The Virginia Oyster Reef Heritage Foundation



he oyster is a keystone species in Virginia's coastal waters. Oysters grow naturally in reefs, which provide habitat for more than 300 other plant and animal species. They are Virginia's equivalent of tropical coral reefs. Oysters are natural water purifiers. They filter algae and sediments from our coastal waters, which increases water clarity and improves light penetration. Seagrass beds, which require sunlight, benefit from the oyster's filtering effects and in turn provide habitat and feeding grounds to many other important species of fish and birds.

The oyster resources of the Chesapeake Bay have been in a state of continuing decline for the past century. Disease,

pollution and overharvesting have been the culprits. By the early 1990s, the population had plummeted by 99 percent of historic levels. Today the habitat and water quality benefits of thriving oyster populations have been nearly lost to the great detriment of Virginia's coastal ecosystems.



A single adult oyster can filter up to 60 gallons of water a day. Before their decline, the Bay's oysters could filter an amount of water equal to the volume of the entire Bay in three to six days. Today, it takes a year or more for our remaining oysters to do the same job.



#### Oyster Restoration Efforts: Virginia Oyster Heritage Program

The Virginia Oyster Heritage Program (VOHP) is a bold initiative launched in March 1999 to restore oyster reefs to the Commonwealth's coastal waters. The Program is a partnership of Virginia state agencies, federal agencies, nonprofit organizations and business groups that have come together to marshal their collective resources toward a large-scale oyster restoration effort.

By 2001, the first phase of the VOHP restoration effort resulted in construction of nine sanctuary reefs and hundreds of acres of sustainable harvest area in the Rappahannock River with four more reefs planned for 2002. Over 15 acres of new reef were also added to sites on the seaside of Virginia's Eastern Shore.

The VOHP has been an effective catalyst for oyster restoration efforts throughout the bay and Virginia's seaside. Eight new sanctuary reefs will be constructed

in Tangier Sound in 2002 in partnership with the Army Corps of Engineers. In the Hampton Roads area, communities have partnered with the VOHP to create local oyster heritage programs, such as the Lynnhaven Oyster Heritage Program.

#### Virginia Oyster Heritage Program Goals

- Construct 3-dimensional (6 - 8 feet tall) oyster broodstock sanctuary reefs which cannot be harvested.
- Create harvest
  enhancement areas by
  spreading a 6-10 inch
  deep layer of shell
  nearby the broodstock
  sanctuary reefs. This
  area will "catch" the
  spatfall from the broodstock sanctuary reef
  and provide a sustainable fishery for Virginia
  watermen.
- Monitor reefs to determine their success in increasing oysters, water clarity, and biodiversity.
- Provide educational materials on the oyster restoration effort; train and use volunteers for reef restocking efforts; and encourage backyard

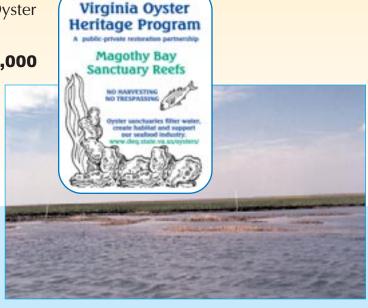
"oyster gardening" to augment restoration efforts.

# We Need Your Help to Restore Virginia's Oysters!

Each new reef constructed by the Virginia Oyster Heritage Program costs almost \$100,000!

One Acre of 3-D Sanctuary Reef \$100,000 (Based on 100,000 bushels of shell at \$1.00 per bushel)

**Broodstock Hatchery Seed \$3,125** (Based on one acre of sanctuary reef)



### Virginia Oyster Reef Heritage Foundation

The Virginia Oyster Reef Heritage Foundation was established in August 2000 to accept donations from Virginia businesses and private citizens in support of the Virginia Oyster Heritage Program and oyster restoration. The Foundation also serves as a repository of private funds needed to match challenge grants and public agency grants.

Our goal is to restore oysters to all of Virginia's coastal waters. Although we continue to seek funding from federal and state sources for

restoration, millions of dollars are needed to restore oysters to Virginia's Chesapeake Bay tributaries and the seaside bays of Virginia's Eastern Shore. Only with your support can we achieve this goal!

If you would like to contribute to the Foundation by holding or hosting a fundraising event or you would like more information about the Virginia Oyster Reef Heritage Foundation, please contact Clifford Schroeder at (804) 320-8030 or vaoysterreef@msn.com.

